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Letter dated 4 May 1993 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of a letter addressed to you by His Excellency Mr. Osman Ertuğ, representative of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (see annex).

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 45, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Inal BATU
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

ANNEX

Letter dated 4 May 1993 from Mr. Osman Ertuğ addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to refer to the recent unprovoked assault on a Turkish cargo ship destined for Gazimagosa port in Northern Cyprus by Greek Cypriot gunboats while it was sailing in international waters off the coast of Larnaca, Southern Cyprus, and to bring to your attention the negative implications of this hostile action on intercommunal relations and the efforts being conducted under your auspices for a negotiated solution in Cyprus.

As you are aware, the incident occurred on 28 April 1993 at around 9.45 a.m. local time, when a Greek Cypriot gunboat approached the Turkish freighter, Alp-5, which was sailing in international waters 20 to 22 nautical miles off the coast of Larnaca and, without warning, started firing at the ship. As a result, the captain of the ship and a crew member were injured.

The Greek Cypriot gunboat was later joined by another gunboat and the two together started following the cargo ship, trying to force it to change course and enter into Greek Cypriot territorial waters, by blocking its way and at the same time firing at it from all directions.

When the ship's distress message was received in Northern Cyprus, our authorities requested assistance from the United Nations Peace-keeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and the nearby British base, but the helicopters that were sent could not approach the ship because of the continuous firing. Upon strong representations by our authorities through UNFICYP, the firing was finally stopped at 12.25 p.m., but the gunboats kept pursuing the ship. Thus the helicopters could arrive at the scene of the incident only at 2.00 p.m. and the wounded were given first aid treatment on board by the British doctors who were flown in.

All subsequent efforts to have the injured flown to Gazimagosa Hospital, which was the nearest one to the area, did not produce results because of the pressure exerted by the Greek Cypriot side. Thus, the ship had to continue its journey, at great risk to the injured on board, until it reached Gazimagosa port at 8.30 p.m. the same day. The wounded crew members were then taken to Gazimagosa State Hospital, where they had to undergo surgery.

After the ship arrived at Gazimagosa port, it was inspected by a team of experts, in the presence of a senior UNFICYP officer. It was observed that, in addition to other weapons, a 20-mm heavy gun had been used in the firing, shattering the windows of the bridge. In fact, it clearly appeared that the bridge was the main target of the assault, which indicates malicious intent to kill or harm the sailors.

There is absolutely no justification for this hostile action of the Greek Cypriot side, which was carried out without warning and in international waters. The Greek Cypriot claim that the ship was in their territorial waters when it was attacked is baseless, because eyewitness accounts by the crew indicate that

there were other foreign vessels in the same area at the same time, sailing closer to the shore, that were not interfered with. The fact that the Greek Cypriot gunboats singled out the Turkish freighter, tried to force it into their territorial waters by firing on it and blocking its way is itself an indication that the Greek Cypriot culprits were aiming to create justification for this act of piracy on the high seas.

This incident once again demonstrates the inability of the Greek Cypriot side even to tolerate the presence of the Turkish flag or anything Turkish in their vicinity. It is also another instance of their hostile policy of blocking all outside links of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus with the outside world.

At a time when efforts are being made under your auspices to achieve progress towards a negotiated solution and confidence-building measures are high on the agenda, I need hardly reiterate that acts of provocation of this nature aimed at creating tension only serve to deepen the abyss of mistrust between the two peoples in Cyprus and hamper prospects for a solution.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 45, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Osman ERTUĞ
Representative
Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus